



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 24, 2005

## PRESIDENT, SECRETARY OF STATE SHARE STAGE WITH ENTERTAINERS TO THANK TROOPS, FAMILIES

By Cassandra Kardeke

221st Base Support Battalion Public Affairs Office

**WIESBADEN ARMY AIRFIELD, Germany --** "I know you've just gotten back from Iraq. I'm pleased to say, 'Job well done,'" President George W. Bush told an audience of 3,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen and family members gathered here February 24 for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see their commander-in-chief and hear his praise for their efforts in the global war on terror.

Among those attending were V Corps Soldiers from the 1st Armored Division, 1st Infantry Division, and other area units, many of whom recently returned from deployment to Iraq.



RICK BUMGARDNER

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice speaks to a crowd of service members and their families prior to remarks by President George W. Bush at Wiesbaden (Germany) Army Airfield February 23.

Following a visit with German

Chancellor, Gerhardt Schroeder,

the president and first lady Laura Bush paid a visit here to meet "the men and women fighting on the front lines of the war on terrorism."

"Laura and I were in the neighborhood and just thought we'd say hi," said Bush to a cheering crowd. Howdy."

Bush got a raucous cheer when he reminded the 1st Armored Division troops in the audience that this wasn't the first time they received a personal appearance.

"It's good to be at the proud home of the 1st Armored Division. Some of you 'Iron Soldiers might have seen me before. I was the guy serving turkey," said Bush, referring to a surprise visit he paid the division in Baghdad for Thanksgiving 2003.

Bush thanked military families for their dedication, sacrifices and support.

"This was definitely worth the wait," said 1st Sgt. Mark Bell, 141st Signal Battalion, one of many who waited a couple of hours in a tent the size of a football field.

The wait wasn't without its diversions, anyway. Spectators rocked to the sounds of headline entertainers Diana DeGarmo -- runner up in last year's "American Idol" television talent contest and recording artist, and country musicians the Gatlin Brothers.

Wearing a camouflage jacket and jeans, DeGarmo performed some of her own songs, had the crowd clapping and singing along to her rendition of Bob Seger's "Old Time Rock and Roll," and ended her performance with a standing crowd singing along to "America the Beautiful."

"No matter what you have heard, everybody back in the States supports you. You are the heartbeat and soul of what keeps our country going," DeGarmo said.

DeGarmo was followed with toe-tapping music by the Gatlin Brothers. No stranger to the Bush family, the Gatlins lived only a few streets away from former President George H.W. Bush during their childhood. The Gatlins first performed for the future chief executive in 1958 and the families became close friends.

"We're old friends of the president, so when we were asked to perform before him we were delighted. And it fit right into our schedule," said lead singer, Larry Gatlin.

"I've never seen or even heard of (the Gatlin Brothers) until now, but they certainly stole the show," said Sgt. Artisha Gilliam from the 3rd Battalion, 58th Aviation of V Corps' 12th Aviation Brigade, based in Giebelstadt, Germany.



BILL ROCHE

Diana DeGarmo, 'American Idol' runner-up and recording artist, performs prior to remarks by President George W. Bush at Wiesbaden (Germany) Army Airfield February 23.

As the Gatlins neared the end of their performance, 21 howitzer blasts shook the tent, signaling the president's arrival. But before he entered, the crowd roared as Master

Sgt. Chantel Sena-Diaz, senior chaplain's assistant for 1st Armored Division, introduced Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who addressed the troops prior to Bush.

"It was such an emotional speech and inspiring to all the Soldiers," said Spc. Eric Miranda, Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 221st Base Support

Battalion, of Rice's remark that, "Because of each of you, this is the greatest military in the world's history."

Rice emphasized the achievements of 1st Armored Division and 1st Infantry Division Soldiers in helping people in their fight for freedom, noting that their success in Iraq is marked by the millions of Iraqis who recently "walked distances, risked their lives and waited in lines to vote."

